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# USIA's effort to promote democracy

President Ronald Reagan's proposal to increase the FY '84 U.S. Information Agency budget by \$65 million in order to foster the growth abroad of democratic values and institutions is in unexpected trouble on the Hill.

Coming in the wake of revelations of previous USIA grants to right-wing institutions, Reagan's new proposal with the grandiose title, "Project Democracy," is inevitably under skeptical scrutiny by liberal democrats, who have their knives out for projects that reflect right-wing ideological bias.

Ironically, the liberals will find on close inspection that most of the projects described in the Project Democracy budget are sensibly and intelligently chosen. In fact, conservative legislators are threatening to oppose the project because so few of their favorite think tanks are supported and in addition the largest single project provides millions for American labor to assist non-communist labor unions abroad.

One explanation for this ideological diversity within the USIA lies in the fact that international programming falls under two separate directorates. The associate director for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Dr. Ronald Trowbridge, and his director for private sector programs, Robert Reilly, take a conservative view, while Dr. Scott Thompson, as associate director for programs, has a more moderate outlook. The director of USIA, the peripatetic Charles Wick, presides uneasily over these factions.

While this controversy bubbles, Reagan officials are anxious to make it clear that this proposed increase

in the USIA budget for democratic institution building is only one of a series of initiatives that are being undertaken to fulfill Reagan's bold commitments in his speech to the British Parliament last June. Beyond promising to "foster the infrastructure of democracy," Reagan in London announced his determination to engage more vigorously in a peaceful "competition of ideas and values" with the Soviet Union.

To orchestrate the U.S. role in the ideological rivalry with the Soviets more effectively, the president finally signed this January National Security Decision Document #77. This secret NSDD establishes for the first time under the National Security Council a Special Planning Group for Public Diplomacy under the chairmanship of the National Security adviser, William Clark. Joining him as members of this group are the secretaries of State and Defense, the directors of USIA and AID and David Gergen from the White House staff.

If sheer weight of rank can insure bureaucratic clout and effectiveness, then this new group should be able to inspire a more subtle and sophisticated response to world events and Soviet moves by the United States in its public statements.

That such improvement is badly needed was the burden of Vice President George Bush's message on his return from his European trip. He was astonished by the extent to which the Marxist guerrillas in Central America are winning the propaganda struggle for European opinion and was shocked to find otherwise well-informed people comparing the U.S. role in El Salvador to that of Russia in Afghanistan.

While this governmental machinery was being rolled into position, the Reagan administration has responded affirmatively to the imaginative idea that a quasi-public, non-partisan foundation might solve the dilemma of how to help democratic political parties abroad without damaging them in the process. Few self-respecting foreign parties can afford to be seen accepting U.S. official handouts, but an independent foundation with a combination of private and public funding might prove acceptable.

To explore this possibility, the Reagan administration has given a \$300,000 AID grant to the bipartisan American Political Foundation for a study to determine "how the United States can help build democratic values and institutions in other nations." Under the co-chairmanship of Charles T. Manatt, chairman of the Democratic National Committee and of Frank Fahrenkopf Jr., chairman of the Republican National Committee, a distinguished executive board to supervise the project has been chosen, and the project director, Prof. Allen Weinstein has just returned from an encouraging trip to Europe.

Based particularly on Weinstein's research into how the Christian Democratic and Social Democratic parties in West Germany have used two foundations largely subsidized by the government to build democratic institutions in the Third World, the Reagan administration is hoping the study will come up with a workable variant of the German approach.

It should not be beyond the wit of man to devise a uniquely American organizational structure that allows the two political parties and business and labor to join in channeling training, expertise and funds to democratic groups abroad that face a heavily financed Marxist challenge. At least the Reagan administration can take credit for trying to find a lasting and non-partisan solution to one of our more serious dilemmas.

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